

Virgil Draper House
121 East Dominick Street
Rome
Oneida County
New York

HABS No. NY-5510

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

VIRGIL DRAPER HOUSE

Location: 121 East Dominick Street, Rome, Oneida County,
New York.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The land on which the city of Rome is now located was included in the Oriskany Patent, which was granted to Thomas Weston and others about 1705. In 1785 the patent was surveyed and divided into allotments. Previous to that time a parcel located to the south and west of the remains of Fort Stanwix had been surveyed and reserved for sale at an auction, in order to pay for the expense of surveying the remainder of the patent. This parcel was subsequently termed the "Expense Lot."

On January 9, 1786, a lottery was held to distribute the other parcels of the patent to various parties. The 460 acre portion which included Fort Stanwix was acquired by William Livingston and Alida Hoffman.¹

In March, 1786, Dominick Lynch, a New York City merchant, purchased the "Expense Lot" at auction, and in July of the same year acquired the portion of the patent which had been owned jointly by Livingston and Hoffman. Through the purchase of contiguous parcels, Lynch increased his holdings in the area to about 2000 acres by 1800.²

Within the next decade William Weston, an English engineer, surveyed Lynch's property and in 1796 drew a map indicating the village plan.³ Streets were arranged in a simple grid pattern, forming blocks measuring 400 by 600 feet, with the lengthwise axis running east to west.⁴ The blocks were sub-divided into building lots, each measuring 66 feet wide and 200 feet deep. Access to the interior of the blocks was provided by various alley arrangements. Lynch called the future city Lynchville, and named the two central thoroughfares after himself and his son, James.

Lynch had chosen the site of his proposed settlement carefully and wisely. From earliest times this area of central New York State had been well-served by inland water routes. A portage route, known as the "Oneida Carrying Place," formed a strategic land connection between Wood Creek, which was the beginning of the water route to the Great Lakes, and the Mohawk River, which flowed into the Hudson River and eventually into the Atlantic. Fort Stanwix was one of several defensive structures built during the eighteenth century to protect this transportation route. This connection was greatly improved in 1797 when the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company opened a canal which linked the Mohawk with Wood Creek. A visitor to Rome in 1802 noted that "this water communication is of in-

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calculable benefit to this part of the world. Produce may be sent both ways . . . "5

The ruins of Fort Stanwix stood on what was designated on Weston's map as the eastern part of block twelve. It was situated on what are now lots five through fourteen and possibly also on parts of lots four and fifteen. During the next century this block was to play a crucial role in the transformation of the village of Lynchville into the city of Rome.

The southeast bastion of the fort was the first to be leveled and the land transformed into a building lot. On this site was erected "a large square frame dwelling,"⁶ where Dominick Lynch resided when in Rome and where his son, James, also lived.

In the midsummer of 1825 the Lynch building burned, and in the following April, Virgil Draper purchased the premises, then known as lots eight and nine.⁷

Like his neighbors John Stryker and Wheeler Barnes, Draper had moved to Whitestown in the early nineteenth century to live with relatives. Arriving in Whitestown in 1806 at the age of 17, Draper was employed in the recently established cotton mills owned by his uncle, Dr. Seth Capron, and by Newton Mann.⁸ In 1822 Draper moved to Rome and supervised for two years a mill owned by Dominick Lynch. After establishing a cotton mill in Stittville and residing there for a few years, Draper returned to Rome, where he purchased Lynch's waterpower and mill property at what was later called Factory Village and "engaged in the manufacture of cotton goods on an extensive scale."⁹

At this time Draper also acquired the lots on which the Lynch dwelling had stood. Here he erected a frame residence with a full two-story pedimented portico, in the Greek Revival style that was characteristic of the architecture in the towns along the Erie Canal.

The 1826 deed for the lots stated that "the buildings and materials now thereon"¹⁰ were included in the conveyance. According to tradition, a number of doors with brass hardware were salvaged from the Lynch house and installed in the Draper house. According to a relative of Draper who still lives in Rome, the two central columns were carved on the front yard of the house, but proved to be so costly that the other two columns were fashioned more simply.¹¹

Draper had paid \$700 for the two lots, which together measured 132 feet along Dominick Street. In August, 1826, Draper sold the western 33 feet of lot eight to Luther and Jephtha Matteson of Rome.¹² Patrick Martin, who owned a livery, later occupied a house on the site.

In 1840 Draper retired from the cotton mill business. He owned a considerable amount of real estate in Rome and was said to have acquired "an ample fortune."¹³ In 1860 he listed his occupation as "gentleman."¹⁴ Draper was a founder of the Fort Stanwix Bank and helped to establish the Rome Citizen, a Whig newspaper.¹⁵ With his family he attended the Presbyterian Church. At his death in 1867 the Citizen published the following notice:

Death of Virgil Draper.---

Another of the old landmarks has disappeared. VIRGIL DRAPER died at his residence on Saturday last, after a brief illness, at the age of 78. He had been a resident of the county for some 60 years, and for the past forty-five years a resident of this village. He was an active and successful business man in his day, but for many years partly owing to age and ill health, he had retired from active business pursuits. His funeral was attended on Tuesday last.¹⁶

Draper bequeathed "the use and enjoyment" of his real estate to his wife, Eliza.¹⁷ In 1868, when she was 76 years old, the house passed to one of her three daughters, Mary.¹⁸ Mary's first husband, Henry S. Will, had died in 1854, and she later married Henry K. White, who, as a partner in the dry goods firm of Spencer & White, was a well-known Rome merchant.

Meanwhile, Draper had constructed another house at the rear of his lot, facing onto Spring Street. This building is shown in an 1845 view of the city and may have been built as early as 1842, when Draper was taxed for "2 Houses & Lots."¹⁹ In 1868 this house became the property of another of Draper's daughters, Julia Kinney, who was a widow.²⁰

In 1917 Mary White conveyed the Draper house to her son, Harry Draper White.²¹ A physician, White had his medical office on the property for many years. In 1925 White and his wife, Marion, sold the property to the Henry P. Smith Post, No. 24, of the American Legion.²² In January, 1970, it was purchased by the Rome Urban Renewal Agency.

FOOTNOTES

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¹Samuel W. Durant, History of Oneida County, New York (Philadelphia: Evert & Fariss, 1878), p. 375.

²Ibid.

³William Weston, "Map of Lynchville," 1796.

⁴The existing block and lot numbers have been changed from the original numbers. The block on which Fort Stanwix stood was originally block twelve, but is now block seven. The present parcel numbers do not correspond to the original lot numbers. In tracing the history of the block over a period of about 175 years, it was necessary to refer to these original lot numbers, which are shown on the 1874 map.

⁵"Journal of Rev. John Taylor's Missionary Tour through the Mohawk & Black River Countries in 1802," The Documentary History of the State of New-York (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1850), III, 1138.

⁶Daniel E. Wager, Our City and Its People, A Descriptive Work on the City of Rome New York (Boston: The Boston History Company, 1896), p. 52.

⁷Oneida County Deeds, Book 41, p. 465.

⁸Daniel E. Wager, ed., Our County and Its People, A Descriptive Work on Oneida County, New York (Boston: The Boston History Co., 1896), p. 109.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Oneida County Deeds, Book 41, p. 465.

¹¹Interview with Mrs. H. D. White, wife of Draper's grandson, May 29, 1970.

¹²Oneida County Deeds, Book 55, p. 220.

¹³Wager, Our County and Its People, p. 110.

¹⁴Eighth Census (1860), New York, Vol. 64, Oneida County, p. 399.

¹⁵Wager, Our County and Its People, p. 110.

¹⁶Rome Citizen, April 12, 1867.

¹⁷Oneida County Deeds, Book 281, p. 212.

¹⁸Ibid., Book 288, p. 403.

¹⁹Rome Assessment Rolls, 1842.

²⁰Oneida County Deeds, Book 288, p. 402.

²¹Ibid., Book 744, p. 109.

²²Ibid., Book 853, p. 226.

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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

At the request of the Rome Urban Renewal Agency, the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Park Service arranged in the spring of 1970 to have recorded five historic nineteenth-century buildings on the site of Fort Stanwix. The site of this important colonial fortification is scheduled to be cleared for archeological investigation and for reconstruction by the National Park Service. Funding for the necessary research and the preparation of the records for the HABS archives was provided by the Rome Urban Renewal Agency (William H. Flinchbaugh, Executive Director) as part of the Fort Stanwix-Central Business District Urban Renewal Project (NYR-173). Mrs. Diana Waite prepared the historic documentation and the architectural descriptions; Jack E. Boucher made the detailed photographic record; the project was under the general supervision of John C. Poppeliers, Senior Editor of the Historic American Buildings Survey.